DOCTOR Fate

IN DEPTH

SLAM-BANG

4 YEARS BEHIND THE Spectre

The forties can best be remembered as the days of the comic geniuses. There were quite a few. Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, for instance, created such well-remembered characters as Captain America, Boy Commandoes, Newsboy Legion, and so many others that only a list can do their creations justice. Otto Binder must surely rank as an early forties comic genius, having written almost one thousand Marvel Family scripts and helping to guide the characters to greatness. There were other, lesser lights in the early days of comics; but only one other writer can classify as a comic genius for his work in the forties: Gardner Fox. He was the writer and creator of the Justice Society of America, Flash, Hawkman, the King, Zatara, Skyman, the Face, and others; he scripted adventures for Starman, Sandman, Spectre, and quite a few other characters.

Certainly one of Gardner's most illustrious "Golden Age" creations was a character which he originally called Doctor Droon. In fact, he wrote the first two stories using that name prior to the appearance of the first in More Fun Comics. But someone, probably Vincent Sullivan, decided to change the name -- to Doctor Fate.

It seems fairly clear from a bit of deduction that Doctor Fate was an extension of Fox's earlier work. In June, 1938, Zatara was introduced, using magic as the premise of the strip. In January, 1940, Fox's Hawkman appeared using the theme of borrowed weapons from the past used against modern day villainy. In that same month, Gardner began work on Doctor Fate, combining the two previous ideas, the magic of Zatara and the theme of Hawkman to create a hero who called "upon secret and ancient sources for the power with which he (fought) unusual crimes of the present," as More Fun 59 explained it.

FIRST HE WAS BORN

Unlike most super heroes, Doctor Fate's origin was not only complicated but incomplete. In fact, he had three origins, each inconsistent with the others.

In More Fun Comics 55, the character was introduced. This was no an origin story, however, and contained only the following indication of Doctor Fate's history:

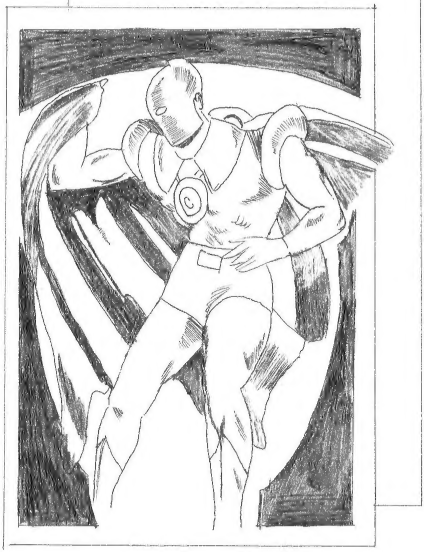
> Student of ancient mysteries, that were partially destroyed when Caesar burned Alexandria's library, delver into the unknown science of the occult and weird, alchemist, and physicist extraordinary -- Doctor Fate has learned the ultimate secret of the Universe -- the true conversion of energy into matter and matter into energy!

The same explanation of his powers was given in most of the early issues and revealed little about Fate's past.

However, the story in this issue did give a considerable amount of detail about Doctor Fate's early career. Even before the introduction on page two, of Inza, Wotan, a would-be world-beater, exclaimed, "Doctor Fate will be at my mercy!" And even before Fate made his first appearance in a comic book, Wotan had sensed his presence. "Fate is here! Here in America!" The two quotes indicated that the battle which ensued was not the first battle between Wotan and Fate; and that the original battle did not take place in America. Indeed, the quote, and the fact that Wotan possessed an omniscient knowledge, seem to indicate that Fate had never been in America.

Later in the story, Doctor Fate explained both his powers and Wotan's to Inza carmer. He gave a minor demonstration of his power, in fact, and explained that, "I draw on the unlimited energy stores in my body -- and direct it at that vase. . .I merely released the energy atoms comprising the vase -- changing them into atoms of dust!" Inza seemed to be quite amazed by his little demonstration of parlor-magic. The fact that the explanation was needed and that Inza was, in fact, amazed, indicate that Inza knew neither Fate's origin or the extent of his powers. Also, he had apparently not yet explained Wotan's powers to her.

From the clues presented in this first story, Doctor Fate's origin seems to be: In some way, probably through extensive research, Doctor Fate gained the power of the ancients. He had of course had to study outside of America because no ancient cultures existed in the Western hemisphere, and at some point in his studies, came across Wotan. The evil wizard, who was Fate's equal in mystic power, clashed immediately with Fate; and Fate won the first battle or battles. Wotan fled to America, his research ended. Realizing that Wotan was his equal, Fate decided to follow him to America to end the threat posed by the villain, and decided that he might need to employ trickery in the battle. He asked a girl he had met, Inza, to help him, but neglected to explain exactly what they would be up against, probably to avoid scaring her.



The following issue gave one further clue. "For years," Wotan shouted, "you stopped me in my pursuits of evil. . ." In other words, the two had battled numerous times outside of America. And Doctor Fate must therefore have existed for quite some time before the story in More Fun 55 took place.

In 58, the first reference was made to Fate's tower: "High on a hilltop in ghost-haunted Salem stands a lonely stone tower! Some say the Vikings built it before Columbus discovered America!" Exactly how Fate gained possession of the Tower was never explained. Nor was it made clear, although it seems probable, that he bought or came into possession in some way of the tower after his first THREE stories, for the tower was not mentioned in THEM.

This issue further confirmed a previous suspicion. The splash panel blurb exclaimed, "His face unknown but his deeds legion!" He apparently had been fighting in secret for many years against "those present day sorcerors against whose black magic law officials are powerless!" Indeed, he had appeared in only three stories to this point -- hardly "legion."

A new element of his origin was added in More Fun 63. Fate explained that he had been living when the house in which the story took place was built. In 1698! This was the first hint that he was not only immortal, as could have been surmised if not proven from previous issues, but ancient. As he explained, "Forget not that I have lived long beyond the ken of mortal men!"

So far, Doctor Fate's adventures had been largely secret. Few pwople knew of his identity. However, in issue 63, a little boy walked up to Inza and said, "I've read of you in More Fun Comics!" Obviously, if there were a comic book of his adventures, Doctor Fate would not remain secret very long. This book can be discounted as one of the many bits of whimsy which can be found in these early comics (such as the time Batman and Robin met Jerry Seigel, the creator of Superman).

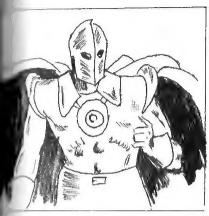
The following issue re-emphasized Doctor Fate's age. In the story, Inza and Fate battled an ancient Mayan God, Mayoor. As the story revealed, Doctor Fate had imprisoned Mayoor in an ancient temple many centuries before. Although it was difficult to pin-point a time from this, it seemed likely that the original battle between Fate and Mayoor occurred in about 1400. During that time, the Mayans were engaged in a civil war (from about 1390 to 1460), and possibly Mayoor was the cause of it.

By this time, most of the suppositions made about Fate's origin from the first two issues had been proven false. For instance, in the first story, Wotan thought that Fate had never been in America; and yet in 64, it was revealed that Fate had been in South America several centuries previously.

Two issues later, in More Fun 65, evidence was given to push his age back considerably. "Possessing the knowledge of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, and those races that dwelt before our written history begins," was the explanation given in this issue of Fate's powers. And since he could only have learned the secrets of prehistory by living through the period, he must have been quite ancient. Prehistory dates back millions of years, but it would be pointless to take the character much further back than twenty thousand years.

The following issue explained not only how he couldn't be killed, but how he managed to live for those twenty thousand years. "He had learned the ultimate secret of the universe: how to convert matter into pure force -- and absorb it in his body! Bullets fired into him were converted into energy and contribute to his tremendous power!" Thus, though not actually immortal by nature, he was able to save himself from any threat to his existence, including, apparently, old-age. This means that his age was, in fact, indeterminable, but could have been more than a hundred million years. However, because he was completely human in form, it was more likely that he was after the cro-magnons, sometime after thrity thousand BC. Obviously he was born closer to historic times than farther; for he could not have learned the secrets of the ancients before the ancients existed.

However, in More Fun 67, a completely different origin, the one later reprinted in Showcase 55, was given. No longer was he intended to be an ancient sorceror. Instead, he was only ten years old in 1920,



as the story revealed; he was thirty one in 1941; and he was fifty-five in 1965! Presumably he still possessed the power to overcome any adversary to immortality, but this time he was given the power by Nabu the Wise, rather than having learned it in the dim, dark past. At any rate, he apparently did have the ability to arrest aging; both he and Inza looked like they were in their twenties in the recent Showcase stories.

If any continuity was intended between the two origins, it was that Doctor Fate took over Nabu's guise in the world. Fate, in other words, became Nabu. Thus Fate would have not only Nabu's knowledge, but his identity; he had the former, why not the latter? Certainly, that was the only way to explain "his" imprisonment of Mayoor centuries before, and "his" knowledge of pre-history in the context of the new origin, and Fate's early battles with Wotan which fitted perfectly into the new origin. And it would confirm Fate's great age; Nabu was, in fact, half a million years old.

In the origin story, Nabu taught Fate only the power of levitation. Presumably other things were taught but when Fate demonstrated his knowledge for his mentor, he mentioned only his power of levitation, and immediately after the demonstration, Nabu gave him his Doctor Fate costume. It appeared, therefore, that to learn the ancient mysteries, Fate had to journey to Alexandria, the cite of the ancient library burned by Caesar, as explained in the first story, and other ancient cities where he studied for many years. In fact, as the origin revealed, he met Inza in Alexandria, presumably where she was also studying the occult.

The origin cleared up several other questions. Apparently, between the time Nabu gave Fate his costume and the time Fate met Inza, he battled Wotan, several times it would appear. Inza was not too familiar with the villain in More Fun 55, so it seemed likely that Fate met her just after Wotan fled to America. As the origin explained, "He met his companion in Alexandria when returning to America from the valley of Ur!" Also, Fate's battles with Wotan -- those prior to his meeting of Inza -- were his first struggles against the forces of evil.

The next major change occurred in More Fun 71, and, in fact, the change nullified much of the explanation of Fate's powers:

> Has learned the secrets of what the ancient world thought "Black Magic" but which are scientific laws so rare they are still unknown to mankind in general!

No longer was Fate a wizard -- he was a scientist. There was precedent for the move, however.

Many of his powers were scientifically explained, such as his power of flight, later explained as levitation, which was, in the first issue, his ability to merge his energy atoms into the ether and thus travel as the wind itself. And he had, on several occasions, used mechanical devices in his fight against evil. However, he had always been a wizard.

The major change effected by the last two explanations of his origin, aside from the obvious changes in his origin, was that after More Fun 67, he predominantly battled scientists and criminals, rather than sorcerors as he had in most of the first dozen issues.

The question now remains: Why did the origin change? Why was his setting changed, his villains? It would seem that the editors felt that Doctor Fate could become a more popular character if given a more conventional origin and existence. He was therefore turned into a playboy who had become a super hero after the death of a parent (as had so many other super heroes); he conformed more with the other popular heroes. His social life was given far greater emphasis, and his villains became the standard criminals who menaced the existence of other heroes.

Another question was caused by the fact that the very issue after his new origin, he took over the cover from the Spectre and pushed the Grim Ghost into the back of the book; never to return to the cover although occasionally to move to the lead spot again. Oddly enough, the Spectre had lost his cover spot and the lead position in More Fun shortly after he had lost a contest in All-Star Comics to both Green Lantern and the Flash. The contest had been to determine which of the three heroes would be given his own comic book.

Obviously, however, the Spectre was losing popularity. The sequence of events seemed to be: In All-Star 1, a vote was taken to see which heroes would appear in All-Star 2. However, though Green Lantern and Johnny Thunder were added, ostensibly because of the voting, it was doubtful that the issue was planned as a result of the vote. It would have taken considerably more than a month to get a tabulated vote; and more than three months to prepare the second issue of this quarterly. Far more likely is the supposition that the results of the poll were used to determine the membership of the Justice Society of America which formed in the third issue -- and Green Lantern and Johnny Thunder would have appeared in All-Star 2 no matter what the results of the poll were.

Probably, Doctor Fate did quite well in the poll. Not only was he added to the Justice Society, but he was given a one issue cover shot, probably to test reader reaction. Meanwhile, the Spectre was supposedly given a chance to win his own comic book, in the contest with the Flash and Green Lantern. Reader opinion was to be the indicator, but more likely, the contest was only between Flash and Green Lantern. The Spectre was probably put in the contest to see just how popular he was -- again to determine his fate. Probably, Spectre ran a poor third in the contest; Flash won his own book and a year later, Green Lantern received his own books, leaving the Spectre in more Fun. The handwriting, however, was apparently on the wall; Doctor Fate soon pushed the Spectre permanently off the cover. (Editor's Note: That the Spectre's popularity was waning at this time was shown several issues after Fate took over the cover, when the Spectre met Percival Poll, the Super Cop, as intentional a shot-in-the-arm as any we can think of. Apparently, Percival, plus the other changes in the strip, worked; Spectre was in the Justice League several issues longer than Doctor Fate and lived in More Fun many issues after Doctor Fate had been replaced.)

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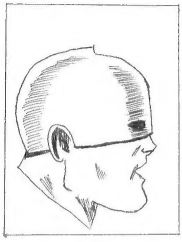
THE CHANGES, REVISITED



In 1941, when his origin and stories were changed, the reasoning must have been to bring Doctor Fate more into line with the other super heroes of the company. In the first eleven stories, he had been decidedly unconventional. His only contact with humanity was Inza, a millionairess from all indications. Not only was he immortal, but anti-social, having never taken Inza anywhere more exotic than the scene of a murder. Not only was he omnipotent, like many other heroes, but invulnerable and generally a difficult hero with which to identify. As he explained, he "must spend (his) life in the tower!" What child, except the most incurably introverted, could identify with a character of this sort?

The first change occurred in More Fun 66 when Doctor Fate removed his helmet for the first time and revealed not only that he was handsome but that he was indeed romantically interested in Inza. The following issue turned him into a mortal, and a millionaire playboy at that. In More Fun 72, his helmet was modified, probably to allow him to express emotion.

But the changes apparently failed. With issue 76, he lost the cover spot, and soon lost his position in the Justice Society. Certainly the changes that had been made were a valiant attempt to improve the character; but they were held back by a far greater difficulty than the company could handle.

The stories were never air-tight. The first twelve stories were six pages; and each was in desperate need of greater length. For example, in More Fun 59, Doctor Fate battled a group of beings from outer space. On the final page, he defeated them, saved a shipload of people who had been injured by the aliens, told the captain of the ship his identity, decided to leave the aliens where they fell, to suffocate, and revealed that he could have saved them if he had wanted. Certainly more room was needed.

An even greater proof of the difficulty Fox had fitting his plots to the six pages was the origin story. So many questions were left unanswered that the origin was more incomplete than complete.

The story began in the Valley of Ur in 1920. Sven Nelson was attempting to discover the origin of the pyramids. "Astrology, science, engineering -- all the arts were known perfectly (by the Egyptians)! That those Egyptians knew what our present scientists do not is unthinkable!" He believed that it was far more likely that beings from outer space had built the pyramids. Sven and his son, Kent, uncovered an ancient temple. Sven explained to his son that "Babylonian legends as well as Roman myths tell of a people who invaded this world before history began!" And Sven discovered writing on the wall that supported his theory. The writing was "not Chaldean. . .nor Egyptian, nor Babylonian! A strange, new language!"

BEHIND THE SPECTRE, Continued

As his father examined the writing near the entrance of the temple, Kent wandered off and discovered a man "buried so long ago -- yet he looks recent!" Rays emerged from the being's eyes and kent instantly knew what the being was thinking. Following the being's intructions, Kent pulled a lever which released the imprisoned man. "My thanks, young man, for what you have done! I can now serve the world again as I used to!" Here was the first unanswered question. Exactly how had this being, later called Nabu the Wise, helped the Earth in the past? Only one clue was given as Kent suggested, "I'll bet you helped build the pyramids!"

But Nabu explained only that "I have learned the secret of molecular control of one's body! My age is close to half a million years! I was born on the planet Cilia as she swung in her orbit passed (sic) the earth!" Still more questions were left unanswered. How did Nabu come to the earth? Why? Where and how did he gain the control of his molecules, and the other powers which he possessed? Who had imprisoned him those many centuries before?

Kent and Nabu went to find Sven where Kent had left him; but Sven Nelson was dead. Nabu explained that, "When these chambers were built, a poison gas was prepared so that any who knew the secret of the chamber was sure to die!" However, in the first place, it was clear that Sven did not know "the secret of the chamber," and indeed the reader was given only an inkling of that secret. Secondly, Kent knew the secret, whatever it was, but was not killed by the gas which, presumably, would have been released within the chamber, rather than in the hallway in which Sven had been.

Nabu tried to comfort the grief-stricken child. "I'll try to repay you for your loss by teaching you the secrets of the universe!" But Kent could think only of his grief. "I don't care about that! All I want is my dad!" Why Nabu did not restore Sven to life was open to question. Doctor Fate, on several occasions, gave life to people; but

Nabu who should have had the same power chose not to impart the breath of life to Sven Nelson.

Kent proved, in the years which followed, to be a good student. And Nabu the Wise became almost a father to the youngster. One day, Nabu explained that he wanted to return to Cilia. Kent immediately expressed a desire to return with his foster-father. But Nabu demurred. "Yours is the mission to bring good to those on Earth who use the ancient magics to do evil!" Kent, accepting the mission which had just been given him, affirmed Nabu's confidence by a brief demonstration of his powers of levitation.

Nabu then gave Kent a costume, his amulet, and disappeared. What happened to him? Did the amulet have any particular power or was it merely a symbol of Nabu's power?

So many questions were left unanswered by this origin that it seemed possible that Gardner wrote the story as a ten-pager (the following issue contained the first ten-page Doctor Fate story) and that the editor was forced to eliminate four pages when he decided to give the strip only six in More Fun 67 instead of the scheduled ten.

One final question worth mentioning in regards the origin was where Wotan gained his power. In the first story, he was described as Doctor Fate's equal, though not quite so bright; later he became only a scientist. Presumably, again, he gained his mystic powers of More Fun 55 in much the same way as Kent Nelson -- through a sage of the past. But which one? Could it possibly have been the very sorceror who imprisoned Nabu those many years before? It was certainly clear that Kent went straight from the Valley of Ur, to Alexandria, and then to America, thus Wotan must have met him in either Ur or Alexandria. Which? When? Et cetera?

INCONSISTENCIES AND LIKE THAT

Although the difficulty in the origin story could have been ascribed to length, the fact was, every story left many questions unanswered. Every story contained plotting errors. The size of the story never seemed to matter; although ten pages gave more room for development, the plots generally had the same number of errors.

In More Fun 55, for instance, Wotan was shown as the leader of a religious cult in the beginning of the story; he was, in fact, leading the worship of his followers. But several pages later, his cult was forgotten, never to be mentioned again. At the end of story, Wotan was thrown out of a skyscraper window by Doctor Fate. But Doctor Fate suspected that perhaps Wotan would escape. In the last panel of the story, he and Inza went to find out if Wotan really was dead.

But in More Fun 56, the two, rather than simply going to the window to see if Wotan was splattered across the pavement, or using one of Fate's numerous powers of "seeing-all", went to the door of death to see if Wotan's soul had appeared there. Immediately after finding that it had not, Fate used his "wisdom" to see Wotan's whereabouts. But why he hadn't used his "wisdom" in the first place was left to the reader's imagination.

Skipping ahead to More Fun 62, Doctor Fate was battling the robots of a mad scientist. As the robots attacked New York, Fate charged. He picked out one robot and battled it -- to determine how it worked. Exactly why he didn't simply destroy the robots wasn't explained. But after battling and defeating the robot, Fate could draw only one conclusion: that the robots were man-made; he might have drawn the same conclusion with a bit of deductive reasoning, actually.

To pick, arbitrarily, another issue to illustrate the point, in More Fun 71, Doctor Fate battled an evil scientist who threatened the world. In the middle of the story, Fate sent Inza to get the Army Air Force to blow up the building. In reality, however, Fate possessed more than three ways of blowing up the building himself. Exactly what he needed the air force for wasn't explained.

Another type of error which was fairly common was typified by an error in More Fun 69. A building was about to crack open. Fate shouted, "Winds of the Earth! Listen and obey! Carry this falling building to safety!" Obviously, Fox meant to say "Carry these people to safety," for several people were endangered. Fortunately, the wind was smarter than Gardner; the wind lifted the broken building parts into the air and re-formed the structure.

THE POWERS THAT BE AND BE AND BE

Not only were the stories often inconsistent, but the powers displayed usually left much to be desired. His abilities were constantly expanded, lost track of, replaced, and in other ways forgotten. Perhaps the best way to show this was by going through the issues and listing the powers used:

More Fun 55: He can appear out of nowhere in a cloud. Wotan thinks Fate is vulnerable to flame, and having battled him before, should know. Knowledge of all that happens. Can use his cape as a teleportation device (Editor's Note: According to the D.C. Index, Doctor Fate did not have a cape in this story; however, he did wear one on the first couple of pages, removing it later in the tale for no particular reason except, perhaps, its excessive weight probably was a bit of a nuisance.) The energy-to-matter-to-energy power already mentioned. Able to put out fire. Can turn things to dust. His energy merges with the atoms and he flies as the wind itself. Judo! Can transfer his energy to other people. Can throw flames.

More Fun 57: His "khu" senses evil. Invulnerable to flames -- and yet Wotan, who had battled him before, thought they could kill him. Coats flame balls with ice (this is a power used a number of times by the Spectre; possibly Gardner, who wrote a number of the Spectre stories, got the two confused). By chanting "N'YETH THRYALLA! FYORNETH DIGNALLETH" and throwing dust on the floor, he could go through it. Can turn people to clay.

More Fun 56: Can see "all" by a mystic sense. Can commune with the "elder intellects" (in this case, a giant eagle). Can imprison a man under the earth. (Editor's Note: Please note accidental reversal of More Fun 56 and More Fun 57 in this list.)

More Fun 58: Can live under water without breathing. Turn things to dust. Creates smoke in which he can see anywhere on Earth.

More Fun 59: Despite the last power named, he can "scan the heavens with far-seeing eyes" -- a sort of telescopic vision. He doesn't possess the "sense" which had saved him previously and which operated along the same lines as Spider-Man's spider sense. Atomic energy within him shatters electric globes. Blow up a spaceship. "Atomic power," such as he possessed, "can be used for any purpose." He now walks through walls -- even though two issues ago he needed dust and a chant and the previous issue he had used a sliding panel to enter his tower in Salem.

More Fun 60: Now has a device with which he peers through walls. He uses it instead of his knowledge of "all" and the numerous other methods he has for the same purpose. Flames from his hands. Can destroy the "creative power" of evil beings.

More Fun 61: Now uses a gun with which he shatters atoms, instead of the power of his own, mentioned in More Fun 59. Uses electrical force to blow up a cannon. Magnetic power to push or pull a planet.

More Fun 62: Electrical energy of his interferes with radio waves. Use magnetism again. Intelligence re-emphasized. Breathes in lightning. (note this power particularly).

More Fun 63: Can break spells on other people. Can hide people in clouds which cannot be damaged. Can open secret panels in walls with a gesture. Breathes life into dying people, using the chant "N'YATH SW'GOHA!" Can not sense evil's presence. "R'GAH NA'LATH!" causes an explosion although he has already found two other ways to do the same thing.

More Fun 64: Uses a crystal ball to see people. But drops a pall of darkness over the world in which he can see the "light of evil" (a rather strange power, but an even more peculiar metaphor). Immune to bullets, Lightning is used to sting a gun from a man's hand.

More Fun 65: Immune to lightning although he isn't breathing it in at this time. Though he still controls flames, he is unable to capture a villain when he forms a ring of flame around himself. The villain shoots "greek fire" at Doctor Fate, but Fate ducks just in time, forgetting that he is quite invulnerable to fire.

More Fun 66: Now uses mental projections to see things. Can see a person's soul. Disappears into clouds. Goes through the floor, this time with the new chant, "D'YALEH NAHAR!", when he could have gone through without saying anything and anyway, he already had one chant for the same purpose, as shown in More Fun 57. Can read minds.

More Fun 67: Levitation. Can banish shadows from the earth. Cause things to disappear. Note that his origin story used less powers than any other.

More Fun 68: Invulnerable to sound waves, knives. Stinging pencils of light from his fingers. Can summon the wind to do his bidding. Can absolutely not be harmed, as he explains to the villain; and yet, in More Fun 65, fire almost injured him!

More Fun 69: Sees things, again, in his globe of onyx. Uses his "psychic powers," or evil-sensor. Believe it or not, he is knocked out in this issue by a "trasvereal ray." And yet in the previous issue, he had said, "No force. . .can harm pure force such as my body!" Use magic secrets to explode the ray machine (which is, at the nearest count, the sixth method he has of exploding an object).

More Fun 70: Gives a man a ring by which Fate can follow the man's actions. More spider-sense. Can still control magnetism and walk through walls without a chant.

More Fun 71: Owns a number of "delicate instruments" handed down from Atlantis in some way which register evil. Has, also, two globes which form clouds and rain. By merging the atoms of his body with a power-ray, he becomes invisible.

More Fun 72: Has another ring (see More Fun 70) which buzzes whenever Inza is in trouble; and his crystal ball will do the same thing. The ring is also used as a screen for mental projections of scenes he wants to see. The villain uses a gas to knock out Doctor Fate. Fate explains that one vulnerability: "My body, partly composed of molecular energy, is immortal! It cannot be harmed! But my lungs -- ah, those are vulnerable! That gas might have held me in a stupor indefinitely!" Fortunately, he was saved; if his lungs were vulnerable, would anyone care to guess how he managed to breath in lightning in issue 62?

The powers were virtually endless, redundent, and overlapping. The reader of the forties and the reader of sixties, truly can't tell the powers without a scorecard, although notably he used less powers and more brawn in later issues.

A further inconsistency in his power, which was not mentioned above, can illustrate the entire problem. Through the various issues, Inza often had to contact Doctor Fate in some way or another. Thus, in issue 55, when she was attacked, she shouted, "NO -- NO -- FATE! DOCTOR FATE!" He immediately appeared in a black cloud and said, "You called, Inza? I -- Doctor Fate -- heard you and I appear!"

When next she called him, In More Fun 59, she had a crystal ball in her apartment which she could use to make the contact, although she didn't need it, really, as 55 proved. Oddly enough, in 60, when danger struck, she ran to Salem to get him and he needed a machine which allowed him to see who was outside his tower.

In 62, as in 55, he "hears her thought transferences as she calls him." Similarly, in 63, he "hears Inza's thoughts calling" him. But in 64, he still needed the crystal ball to see her.

After not appearing in 65, Inza wanted to contact Doctor Fate in 66. She stood on her balcony that night and concentrated. But fail to contact him! "Perhaps my mind isn't attuned to his yet!" Later, though, when she was endangered, he heard her thought transferences.

When next she called him, in 71, she needed his assistance in New York. Instead of using her crystal ball or her thought transferen she drove to Salem to get him! And in 72, she visited her grand-parent's farm, and wore a ring which allowed Fate to keep in "psychic

touch" with her. Fate, to avoid any difficulty, also used a crystal ball to keep track of her.

INZA

Doctor Fate's exact relationship to Inza was never clarified in More Fun, although it was always obvious that a romantic entanglement was involved. Generally, the relationship fluctuated, though always coming back to true but misguided love.

In 55, Inza seemed to be considerably more than just his helper. Wotan explained his attempt to kill her, "When the girl dies -- then Doctor Fate will be at my mercy!" Exactly what he meant by this threat was never explained. But the dire implication never proved to be true. Inza was never terribly vital to the conclusion of a case; he was never dependent upon her sharp wit for survival. On the other hand, Fate did seem to relish her moral support. When he went to battle Wotan, he took Inza with him, for no particular reason, even though her life would be endangered.

In the following issue, she was simply billed as "his beautiful accomplice," accompanying him on the end of an adventure they started together.

But in 57, the first attempt to explain her presence was made. He took her with him mainly because he wanted her to be near, but later in the story, Fate did explain that, "You are no adept to stand these shocks, Inza! I must take you with me -- or you are lost!"

It would be easy to believe that between 57 and 58, Fate and Inza had a fight, although such was not mentioned. She probably realized that if she stayed away from him in the first place, her life wouldn't be endangered; and certainly taking her into the blaze of battle was no way to treat a lady. Thus, when the story began in 58, Fate was forced to use his weakest excuse to draw her into the case. "She may discover a clue that I, because I must spend my life in the tower, may miss!" He was just rationalizing, however; because he had enough devices in his tower to keep Sherlock Holmes in clues for ten years. He merely wanted an excuse to be with her.

The two seemed to be getting along better in 59, though, because she called on him to help solve a mystery. "We shall look into the matter together, Inza," he explained. It was logical for her to call him for help, and equally logical for him to take her with him as he solved the mystery. But the fact was, he wanted to be with her; he admired her personality, not her sleuthing ability.

In 60, she was just "Doctor Fate's friend," but that was better than nothing. And in 61, she was his "companion of many adventures" -- bearing the same relation to Fate that Doctor Watson bore to Holmes. However, they seemed to be in love. Knowing better than any person the extent of his powers, she nevertheless cautioned him to be careful, as any lover would have done.

In 62, she played on his pride with a comment that the world would be lost if it were not for Fate. In 63, he showed great concern for her life. In 64, Doctor Fate was concerned for her welfare when she took a

trip with a friend to the Mayan territory. He wanted to watch her for safety's sake but neglected to do so. Her life was endangered when Mayoor captured her and told Fate that unless he left the villain alone Inza would be killed. Surprising both villain and girl, Fate exclaimed "Then die she must to save the world!" He attacked.

Though she didn't appear in 65, ostensibly (though not shown) because she had argued with him again, this time over his willingness to let her sacrifice her life for mankind, she was again in 66, and both openly admitted their love for the other. Absence apparently made the heart grow fonder.

The following issue, Kent Nelson and Inza embarked on an extremely active social life. In 67, they attended a dinner party. In 68, they attended an opera. In 69, they attended a formal house party. And in 70, they were the Bon Voyage entourage for one of Inza's friends.

Also in 70, the old debate, previously mentioned in 64,65, and 66, popped up. Wotan and Karkull captured Inza and a threat to her safety enabled them to capture Fate who explained, "For your sake, Inza, I must allow myself to be captured!" He had learned his lesson in 65.

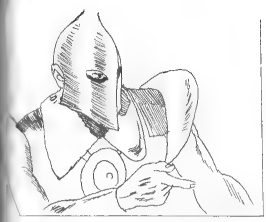
More explanation was given in 70 of why he took her with him. He explained that he would leave her in his tower, but "danger would always be with you in my tower, for the primal ones know me and mine. You should be safer with me!" Interestingly, however, though he was attacked every issue, no villain ever came within striking distance of his Salem tower. Sounds like more rationalization!

In 71, Doctor Fate had to go to the Southwestern United States. "I'd rather leave you here in safety," he explained, suggesting that he leave Inza in his Salem tower where, just the issue before, he had said "danger would always be with" her. But Inza had forgotten his explanation of the previous issue and explained that she would rather go with him. "I've found that the safest place to be in time of danger is with you!"

His devotion was also shown in this issue. As he and she flew to the Southwest, the villain of the story pushed the Earth out of its orbit and moved it towards the sun. Immediately, the heat became too great for Inza and she fainted. Fate took her to the top of a mountain and set her down. Meanwhile, the villain had contacted the leaders of the world and told them to pay his price or else! The world leaders met in each country and sent notice to the villain that they would do as he said. The whole process must have taken at least one day, possibly a week, in consideration of the "due process of law." But Doctor Fate, when the earth was returned to its orbit, was still at Inza's side waiting for her to revive. What devotion!

As mentioned previously, Fate sent Inza, in 71, to summon the air force. But by the time the planes, in which Inza sat, having somehow wangled a complete violation of the rules, arrived, the villain's home had already been blown up. Fate flew to the plane to take Inza with him. The following dialogue ended the story:

Pilot: Say, was this just an idea to meet your boyfriend?
Inza: Probably Doctor Fate could tell you, if he would!



BEHIND THE SPECTRE, Continued

In 72, Inza visited her grandparents and Fate missed her so much that he made her wear a ring which could keep them in "psychic touch" at all times. Also, he kept a crystal ball near him in which he could see danger if it lurked by her. Apparently, though not mentioned, the ring was the "engagement ring."

GOD OF ALL HE SURVEYS

He that hath done all these abominations, he shall surely die. (Prophets, Ezekial 18)

God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble,
Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed,
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;
Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,
Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.
(Psalm 46)

They killed and destroyed wantonly! They deserved death!
Doctor Fate

The way of the ungodly shall perish.
(Psalms 1)

Oppose me -- and die!
Doctor Fate

Whereas many super heroes controled power roughly equivalent to those of God, Doctor Fate truly believed himself to be the Lord, or at least gave that impression in his More Fun appearances. Certainly the second quotes, from Psalms, aptly described Doctor Fate. As Inza explained, the safest place to be in times of danger was by Doctor Fate; in other words, at the Lord's side. "You should be safer with me!" he had said, and just as the Lord offered refuge to those who needed it, so Doctor Fate gave to mortals shelter in the storm.

Few heroes were as unremitting as Fate in the deliverance of justice. In most cases, through the seventy-first issue of More Fun, he meted out justice as he saw fit; just as the Lord was His own court of law, so Doctor Fate was his own court of appeals.

Fate tossed Wotan out of a window in an attempt to kill him in More Fun 55. Similarly, Fate destroyed without explanation of any sort the villains in 58, 62, 63, and 64. God's explanation was "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Prophets, Ezekiel 18) and Doctor Fate surely believed in this gospel.

In 56 and 57, Fate caused Wotan and Mango the Mighty, respectively, to be imprisoned, one in the earth, the other as a statue; both, ostensibly, were dead. In 57, Fate explained his destruction of Mango with, "It is (Mango's) time to DIE!"

NOTICE TO READERS: No back issues are currently available .

In 59, Fate destroyed the air supply of a large number of beings from outer space, leading to their eventual death. However, the power of life and death was his; he explained that his "atomic energy could be put to any use," so he could have saved them had he been more merciful.

However, he was occasionally merciful. In 60, he discovered that the Three Fates had caused a menace to New York. He explained that, "They attacked man! They killed and destroyed wantonly! They deserve death!" But he was, in fact, merciful, only sealing them in their cave and destroying their power to create evil.

In the next issue, he brought to justice a man who had betrayed his planet by consorting with raiders from another planet. "All men who conspire against their fellows should pay their debt with their lives!" he explained after killing the man. "Thou shalt not kill," said the Ten Commandments.

In 65, raiders from an underwater city attacked mankind. In punishment, Fate killed the leader of the sub-mariners, and then destroyed his underwater city and all, presumably, within it. Fate visited the city's evil upon itself, just as had God with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Doctor Fate next killed a man who attempted to steal his cousin's inheritance, in 66, by banishing him to float forever in outer space. "Thou shalt not steal," and "Thou shalt not covet. . .anything that is thy neighbor's," says the Ten Commandments; Doctor Fate believed His words.

Peculiarly, in 67, Doctor Fate explained his omnipotence to the villain who, faced with the invincible, leaped out of a window to his death. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." (Pentateuch, Exodus 19)

In 69, Fate sentenced Ian Karkull to a life as a shadow, unable to touch anything. And in 70, Fate was indirectly responsible for the accidental self-destruction of both Wotan and Karkull.

Just as he controlled death, he controlled life. Once, he gave life back to Inza when she was turned into a statue. And on another occasion, he breathed life into a man condemned to death by a voodoo spell.

HIS IDENTITY

Unlike most super heroes, Doctor Fate, in his first seventeen adventures, operated almost entirely in secret. Few people knew of him, and those that did were invariably the worse for the knowledge.

In 55, for instance, Wotan knew of Fate's existence. And in the first two Fate stories, Wotan was thrown out of a window and imprisoned in the Earth. A second character to learn of Fate's identity was Thomas Frawley, who had been assigned hypnotically by Wotan the task of killing Inza. Fate intervened, however, and broke the hypnotic spell. As the Magic Master was about to remove Frawley from the room, to protect him from a fire which Wotan had just caused, Fate said,

"Forget all you know of this night's work! I -- Doctor Fate -- so order you!" Even as he revealed his identity, he caused the man to whom he revealed it to forget. As for Wotan's hundreds of followers, who might have known of his existence, they were forgotten in the story, and will he discounted here also. Thus, at the end of the second story, of the three people who have learned of Doctor Fate's existence, one has been imprisoned in the earth, one has forgotten, and one, Inza, has fallen in love with Fate.

Mango the Mighty learned of Doctor Fate's existence in 57, but was, of course, destroyed. And in 58, too, Fate killed the one man who learned his identity, the villainous sorceror. Hundreds of attacking aliens learned of Fate's existence, but all were killed in 59.

However, perhaps five hundred passengers on a ship did learn Fate's name and suffered no harm for the knowledge. The captain of the ship, after seeing Fate battle the aliens, asked who he was. "I am Doctor Fate!"

In 60, the Three Fates learned his identity but were sealed in a cave. Scientists learned his identity in 61 and were not destroyed, for they were not evil. But in 62, when the villain learned that his opponent was Fate, he was consumed in fire.

In 63, it was revealed that a comic book had been appearing featuring Doctor Fate's stories. Fate could do nothing about the estimated 250,000 readers of More Fun Comics; however, he did kill the sorceror who learned his identity in this issue.

Mayoor's fate, in 64, pointed out the nature of Doctor Fate's mercy. In their original battle, many centuries before, Fate had merely imprisoned Mayoor. When, however, Mayoor escaped and again menaced the world, Fate had to destroy him. On the other hand, a friend of Inza's had accompanied her on her trip to Mayan territory and, as it later turned out, the friend was working for Mayoor. Fate disarmed the man but showed mercy; he didn't kill him although exactly what happened to him was not shown in the book.

"I am known as Doctor Fate," he told the evil fishman, N'YARL, in 65. And then he punched him. N'YARL fell backward, reeling with the force of the blow, and fell on a sword, killing himself. Fate then destroyed the city, some inhabitants of which knew of his existence.

In 66, three people learned of Fate's existence and lived-to-tell-the-tale: Helen, the leopard girl, her boy friend, and the owner of the house in which Inza was a guest. Interestingly, however, the last named thought Fate was a burglar and kicked him out of the house. On the other hand, when Fate found the villain, he said, "I am Doctor Fate!" The villain immediately retorted, "How did you know that (I did it)?" Fate explained, "I have the ability to read men's minds!" The pleasantries out of the way, Fate hurled the man into outer space to soin for eternity.

A dialogue inconsistency in 67 brought out an interesting point about Fate's fame. Doctor Fate was battling several shades, one of which commented, "YOU! Even in the nether world we hear of you!" This

implied that people on the surface had heard of him, which they generally hadn't. And oddly, though his fame was supposedly heralded in the nether world, when Fate went to the land of the shades, he was forced to demonstrate his awesome power to the unbelieving leader of the souls. As a sign of God, Fate caused a skeleton's head to disappear; and the leader of the nether world knew that he must obey Fate.

Several policemen saw Fate in 68, and even thought him suspicious, but Fate hypnotically made them forget their suspicions. He didn't bother to introduce himself to the officers, but he did explain that, "Mr name is Fate! Doctor Fate!" to the villain who, after learning of Fate's awesome powers, hurled himself to his death.

In 70, Inza proved herself a true woman, unable to keep her mouth closed. She and Kent Nelson went to a ship to see one of her friends who was in danger. She introduced the two men. "This is Kent Nelson! Bob, he is also Doctor Fate!" His identity revealed, Fate had little to worry about, for Bob was a friend and never revealed either his existence or his secret identity.

Later in the story, when a rescue party arrived to rescue Fate and Inza, Fate had to rescue the rescue party. One of the men in the group shouted after the rescue, "What a guy! Look at the way he rides through the air!"

In the following issue, Inza again demonstrated her inability to follow directions and keep her mouth closed. Fate had charged into the villain's den to do battle with Adam Igorovich and his henchmen; Fate left Inza outside the villain's house. However, after a few battle scenes, Adam tricked Inza into the house. She, thinking the fight over, saw her companion and said, "Doctor Fate! It's good to see you!" Adam then bellowed, "So that's who you are," as though the knowledge made any difference.

Adam blew up his own house and took his own life. As the story ended, two pilots, and presumably others in the squadron dispatched to blow up Adam's house, learned of Fate's existence. Inza, again, told the pilots her boy friend's name, obviously proud to be his girl. As Fate and Inza flew off, one of the pilots said, "That building we came to bomb has been destroyed!" The other pilot was not particularly surprised, however. "Sure it was! That -- that guy was Doctor Fate! WHEEE!"

For the first time, in 72, Fate's existence became common knowledge. The name had apparently been passed along the underworld grapevine. Two crooks had been told to leave the country by Doctor Fate. The thugs decided to call their former boss before leaving, to warn him that Fate was on his way to capture him. The gang leader, over the phone, repeated the thugs' description, "A guy flying through the air? In gold and blue?" One of the hirelings, standing by the boss, explained, "That's Doctor Fate!" The crooks had obviously heard of him, despite Fate's campaign to keep his name out of the paper and destroy all the criminals who learned of his existence, for they were indeed not interested in tangling with the man of the gold and blue. However, the public had still not learned of Fate's existence. Inza's grandfather, who saw Fate as he flew into battle, thought he had been seeing things.

He had obviously not heard of Doctor Fate, nor had his wife; and Kent and Inza didn't reveal Fate's name as her grandfather described him.

At the end of the story in 72, there were at least a half a million people who had heard of Doctor Fate. As the adventures continued and he began to capture and turn-over to the police common criminals, his deeds became generally known.

GAR FOX, THE AUTHOR

Although Doctor Fate managed to maintain his anonymity, Gar Fox was not quite so successful. His name never appeared on the series, even though he wrote the first 28 stories and created the hero; but his writing style was stamped on a number of issues. For instance, in 56, a caption explained, "Wotan has stumbled on some vast secret of nature -- how to increase the electric and magnetic flow between the poles!" Wotan then said, "I shall increase the magnetic force between the poles -- and the entire earth shall blow up under the strain!" The scientific explanation and plan was unmistakably Fox's.

Of course, a further clue was given in several issues, such as 59, when blurbs exclaimed, Doctor Fate "calls upon secret and ancient sources for the power with which he fights unusual crimes of the present!" This line pointed to Hawkman, and also to the influence of Gardner Fox.

In 60, Doctor Fate found the perpetrators of a scheme against mankind. He looked at them and then said, "The three fates! The norns of the Norsemen! The Spinners of the ancient Greeks!" Fate definitely knew whom he was battling, and the reader knew from whose "swipe files" the sentance came. Matter of fact, one of the illustrations of Fox's usage of his "swipe files" was in 69. Fighting Kardull's evil shadowmen, Doctor Fate explained to Inza, "Shadows, they have featured often in magic and myths! There are tales of the Banks Islands, where if a man's shadow falls on a stone, it will kill him. In Arabia, a hyena stepping on a man's shadow deprives him of speech!" No doubt, Fox found this in his two filing cabinets of miscellaneous bits of information!

SPEAKING OF MISCELLANEOUSNESS

One of the most peculiar errors of the "Golden Age" was that the cover of More Fun 56 belonged on More Fun 55! The cover, which was reprinted in The Comic Reader 38, depicted Wotan holding Inza and shooting flames at Doctor Fate who held his cape up in protection. The three were standing in front of a huge statue.

In fact, the situation depicted came from the story in 55. The statue was the "god" worshipped by Wotan's followers. More importantly, Wotan possessed the power of throwing flames from his hands in 55, but not in 56. And further, Fate, depicted on this cover as protecting himself from the flames, was vulnerable to flames in 55, but in 56. Moreover, an identical scene appeared in the story of 55, not in 56.

Apparently, a mistake was made allowing the Spectre to accidentally appear on 55; as far as the Spectre was concerned, it didn't matter, for his covers were invariably symbolic and could have appeared on any issue.

The old comics were quite creative; so creative, in fact, that many stunts originated in the forties have been used today in the modern heroes' stories. Of course, the similarities are quite coincidental. As Fox explained, "I (would) have not time to go rumaging through old and rare comics (even if I had them in my possession, which I don't) for ideas. It's easier to make them up!"

Nevertheless, More Fun was a spawning ground for ideas that have since been revised for the modern heroes. The numerous ideas used in the Spectre and in modern comics will be discussed another time, but Doctor Fate was not entirely without his good ideas.

For example, in More Fun 56, Fate used a stunt that would, in the sixties, become the bane of Green Lantern. Fate battled Wotan and prevented Wotan from using his weapons. "I. . .experimented with my source of power and found that I could control yours!" He had presuggested that the machine not work, just as Green Lantern has presuggested the solution to so many mysteries.

Of course Doctor Fate and many other omnipotent heroes have faced a similar problem: by all rights, they could have wiped out evil by a mere wish. But each hero seemed to have gotten around the difficulty in some way, usually by ignoring it. Fate's explanation was, "I cannot fight men whose weapons I know nothing about!" Thus he couldn't fight all of evil, whose machinations he doesn't know. Green Lantern used a similar explanation in number 38 to explain why he couldn't simply will the Changeling out of existence. "Just as you cannot will your ring to find an object if you don't know where it's hidden," explained the Changeling, "neither can you overcome me with it -- because you don't know what I REALLY look like!"

In 68, Doctor Fate battle an early Sonar. The villain used sound waves to crack buildings, people, and anything else he wanted; the principle used was the same as that which explains a glass's cracked when an opera singer reaches a high note. The principle was later used to explain Green Lantern's villain.

In 69, Ian Karkull invented a transvereal ray which turned his gang into shadows. As such, they could walk through walls and not be touched. This very same gimmick was later used by the Shadow-Thief in Hawkman.

Mentioned perviously was the fact that after More Fun 68, a great change occurred in Doctor Fate's stories. The big difference between the early and later stories was that the later stories featured criminals whereas the early issues depicted Doctor Fate battling, almost exclusively, against sorcerors.

However, the plotting of the later stories also was different. In the later stories, Doctor Fate began to do more fighting with his hands than in previous stories. Previously, his magic had always sufficed but towards the later days, his powers were "played-down" in favor of more and more action.

In both 71 and 72, he burst through walls into the criminals' lair even though he could have flown through the walls without breaking

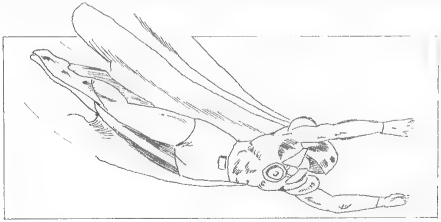
the ; crashing through, however, was far more dramatic. But the real proof that the change had occurred was in 72 when Fate finally cornered the villains. He could have used any number of magical tactics, but instead he pulled the old Super- no stunt of clonking their heads together. What's more, he turned the criminals over to the police; never before had he done this.

But there was precedent for his turning into a typical crime-fighter. In the first published battle, for instance, Fate leaped on Wotan in order to break a spell cast by the villain. "Sometimes," Fate exclained prophetically, "I think a good fight accomplishes more than all the learning in the world!" In 58, after a mystic battle with a thief who stole the Book of Thoth, Doctor Fate slugged the villainous sorceror. His explanation for charging into the group of aliens, in 59, and slugging it out with them was, "I've been in need of a little exercise!" Further, in 71, he justified a fist fight with the criminal gang by saying, "I could blast all of you to bits but I like a good fight as well as the next fellow!" He had, for a long time, been pre-disposed to hand-fights; and when the editor decided to make the character more like other DC heroes, Fate was ready to charge into the battle, fists flailing.

Going along with the change in story and technique was a change in dialogue. Actually, the change had occurred considerably earlier than the later more important changes; but when the dialogue change occurred, it was as a harbinger of things to come. In 56, to give an example, he was as glib as Doctor Strange. "Are you willing to face those gods of eld, the fiery Baal -- cruel Moloch?" he asked Inza. In 57, he commented to Hakro, 'One way only there is of conquering these!" And though in 58 he was using the same type of dialogue, it was obvious that it would not last long for as he prepared to slug the villain, he yelled, "I'll kayo you!" Indeed, it was only one issue later that he engaged in his first snappy repartee: As he threw one crook into a cluster of other criminals, he said, "Let's play nine-pins!" And as he bowled over the several gang members, he explained, "A perfect strike!"

WHERE IS DOCTOR FATE?

Peculiarly, the Doctor Fate of the first eleven More Fun stories sesembled Doctor Strange, the Doctor Fate of later issues resembled the majority of DC super heroes with similar powers, and the



new version of Doctor Fate in Showcase resembled the early Spectre.

The original Doctor Fate was a character of mystery. He used mystic chants, continually researched the mysteries of the lost civilizations, battled other mystics. Doctor Strange, oddly enough, has turned into an exaggerated Doctor Fate, in that he fights the same type of menace, uses similar powers, and maintains an aura of mystery. The later Doctor Fate, however, was on a level with most DC heroes, including Starman, Superman and any number of other omnipotent godlings. His stories involved gangsters and action-packed battles against them. The modern Doctor Fate is a conglomeration of both of the two "Golden Age" Fates. The modern version carries over some of the mystery; but also battles what amount to common menaces. It was exactly this combination which the Spectre used, combining powers quite similar to Doctor Fate's with conventional criminals. At any rate, the three Doctor Fates are an odd trilogy.

ARTWORK

Perhaps the greatest asset of the original Doctor Fate was Howard Sherman's artwork. Fate was well-proportioned, the other characters well-handled, and the general standards of the art considerably above those of the "Golden Age." (Editor's Note: The writer of this article feels that the artwork was the greatest asset of the strip but relegates its discussion to one paragraph at the end of the article -- and a short paragraph at that. We don't know why -- but assume that the writer is not adept at discussion of artwork as that of written material. Suffice it to say, however, that attempting to picture Howard Sherman's Doctor Fate artwork in terms of his modern artwork is impossible -- there is no comparison.)

ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

BEHIND THE SPECTRE has no conclusion. The story is still being written in the Justice League of America and Showcase. Further, what conclusion can be drawn about a character of this sort? He was quite popular in the forties despite several difficulties mentioned herein. And in his Justice League revival, he managed to stand out among his fellow JLAers. Can this be the genius of Gardner Fox we spoke of in the beginning? We frankly don't know!

Because of the lack of available research material, this article was intended to cover a specific period in Doctor Fate's career -- from More Fun 55 to 72.

Credit where credit is due: Jerry Bails and his microfilm library, which helped to fill in the issues our collection is missing, namely, More Fun 55 to 72. And special thanks to Gardner Fox, without whom this article would probably have been a discussion of the Spectre.

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THE BIG MAC

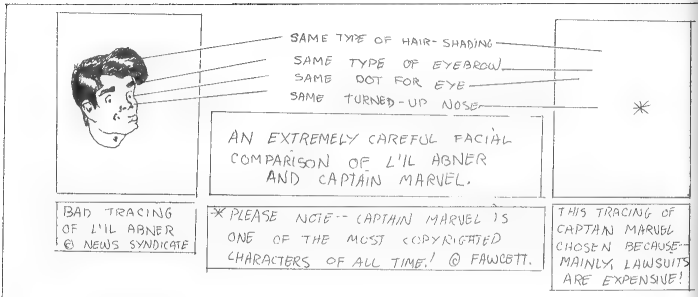
THE REAL STORY OF GASP! HOW CAPTAIN MARVEL MAY HAVE BEEN CREATED! AND SHUDDER! WHO HE WAS REALLY A DIRECT IMITATION OF, BY GEORGE!

Had Captain Marvel survived the sales drought of the early fifties, he would have been twenty-five years old this year. In more than one sense. He was, of course, created in 1940 and his strip would have been, therefore, one score and five. But also, he might finally have reached a mental age of twenty-five. But on the other hand, in his thirteen years, the Big Red Cheese never matured. He was as innocent in court with Superman as he was courting deals with Spy Smasher. Alas, he would probably not have matured in the last twelve years any more than he had in the halcyon first thirteen.

But we've all heard of the child's heart which the mighty, pulsating yellow streak of the Oaf concealed. Why mention it now?

Many fans have attempted to prove the source of Bill Parker and CC Beck's inspiration. Some have suggested that an old Fred MacMurray movie was the inspiration for Captain Marvel; and have pointed out that facially, Captain Marvel was quite similar to the actor. This seems a likely theory. Other fans have suggested simply that the creators wanted to parody Superman. Both theories are logical enough and may very well be true. But looking into the situation more deeply we can add yet another possible source. An old comic strip! And why not? Superman and Batman were founded as much in old comic strips (the Phantom, for instance) and pulps (Doc Savage) as in anything else. Why not Captain Marvel?

In 1939, Fawcett Publications created Master Man, as direct an imitation of Superman as any hero that ever infringed on the Man of Steel. National sued the character into an early grave. Possibly stung by the event, perhaps angered by National's dim view of plagiarism, Fawcett decided to parody the character. However, they didn't want to go quite so far as they later went with Hoppy, the Marvel Bunny, or Terrytoons went with Mighty Mouse. Instead, they wanted a tongue-in-cheek Superman.


SAME TYPE OF HAIR-SHADING
SAME TYPE OF EYEBROW
SAME DOT FOR EYE
SAME TURNED-UP NOSE
AN EXTREMELY CAREFUL FACIAL COMPARISON OF L'IL ABNER AND CAPTAIN MARVEL.
BAD TRACING OF L'IL ABNER © NEWS SYNDICATE
*PLEASE NOTE--CAPTAIN MARVEL IS ONE OF THE MOST COPYRIGHTED CHARACTERS OF ALL TIME! © FAWCETT.
THIS TRACING OF CAPTAIN MARVEL CHOSEN BECAUSE MAINLY, LAWSUITS ARE EXPENSIVE!

The Fred MacMurry idea accepted for its possible verity, we submit that Captain Marvel was a combination of Superman and L'il Abner (whose comic strip life began in approximately 1935). The similarity between the Dogpatch Wonder and the Blue Cheese is striking.

First, Captain Marvel was as close in appearance to L'il Abner as he was to Superman. Both Abner and Marvel had bug noses, and black wavy hair with similar shading. The characters were both well-built, and the same type of dot for an eyeball, and worse surprisingly similar boots. Second, Abner was the archetype ignoramus. Naive, childish, and comical, he intellectually rivaled Captain Marvel, no wizard in his own right. Third, prior to his marriage in 1952, L'il Abner was as innocent as a new-born baboon. His boyish exuberance was channeled into action, not sex. Needless to say, Captain Marvel never sexually matured, and his battles with beautiful women (friend and foe alike) were notably similar to Abner's frustrations of Daisy Mae's desires. Fourth, couched in the innocence of Abner was parody of the establishment. Similarly, Marvel's naivety could not hide the satire of the comic book establishment, namely Superman. Fifth, L'il Abner's source of strength was a mystical old woman, Mammy Yokum. Captain Marvel's source of strength was a mystical old wizard, Shazam (who bore some resemblance to Poppy Yokum). Sixth, Capp's drawing of fear and concern were notable, artistic excellence aside, for their beads of perspiration. L'il Abner was the original perspirer, Captain Marvel his imitator in the sweat department.

Seventh, David Manning White has suggested that the overpowering symbol of L'il Abner was his attempt to throw off his parent's yoke; trying to assert his independence. In fact, Capp attempted to show Abner's attempt to surpass his parent's accomplishments (the American goal for children) by alternately drawing Mammy Yokum larger and smaller than her son. Captain Marvel seems to symbolize the same situation, growing above the world as he "matures," but shrinking back to normal at other times.

Finally, there is a similarity between the names Al Capp and Captain Marvel. Could it be an unconscious footnote to Captain Marvel's real creator, Al Capp?

SELF ANALYSIS

BY TOM FAGAN

Tomorrow he would give the interview. But tonight he would simply enjoy contemplating about it.

T'would be jolly; t'would be droll. Best of all though ----it would be cutting. A slashing of imagination; a burning of wonderment; a sterilization of fantasy.

Presumably this time, he would talk about television. Discourse learnedly about the latest, new, detective-god hero. Relate the cause and effect of this fresh image upon trey, ten trillion, sheep-like viewers.

That was what the interview called for; that was the agreement. Stake another hero; down a favorite; sell a million or more copies of the magazine paying for the civilized crucifixion --- the reward, not thirty pieces of silver, nay, a check for a thousand and more dollars to deposit in the personal checking account.

All for talking. Ah, what one could do with words. Particularly, when one was quoted; especially, when one's words were recorded on the printed page.

One could rouse a whole country, in fact, make an entire world a bit apprehensive. Maybe with a bit of practice and technological development ---frighten a whole universe.

Tomorrow, yes, tomorrow. First, he mused, he would give polished views about the currently popular figure of violent authority, who brought justice to the silvered, flickering-shadowed screen with his gimmicked-up cars, flashing fists and armaments of awe.

Criticize first the novels which brought the hero to public popularity, then the writer himself, and further the movelmakers for bringing the writer's tales out in cinemascopic splendor on full-blown screens.

Then the television moguls for their part in bidding nation-wide welcome twice weekly to the new champion. Then the composers for introducing the hero's tornado-beating theme song into the top ten hits of the day.

Then the fast-buck boys with their specialized T-shirts and stationary for sale with blatant advertisements of "Let's Fate It Gang, I'm a Madman Too --- Here's My Hard-Earned Dollar for. . ."

Then --- Oh, how subtle --- Introduce COMIC BOOKS into the interview conversation. Convince the newsman, copying down each word with rapid enthusiasm --- how comics were really responsible.

Avow eruditely --- Such a television JUST could not be popular today if not a public penchant for violence had been force-fed by the comics of the 30's, 40's and 50's. Add as a soft afterthought --- And still sadly enough today in the 60's.

But do it disarmingly. Make it appear like this is a natural conclusion the interviewer is reaching himself. But of course, he has your full agreement all the way as to the truth of the conclusion.

Agree. Concur. Meditate a bit. Seem to ponder somewhat. And the recording pencil will scrawl cross copy paper with glee.

Oh, the finished article! Presumably, all about the television hero. Yet sandwiched in here and there --- good, chunky paragraphs about harmful effects of comics. Enough to keep the public's jaundiced eye constantly fixed upon them in never-ending suspicion.

Who would really be the target of tomorrow's interview? Besides the television hero, he'd be honing his sights in --- on -- Maybe, Spiderman? Right now, he wasn't sure; but he'd find a target alright. For he'd already:

Extinguished Green Lantern; snapped off Plastic Man; breezed over Air Boy; outdone Daredevil; crushed Crimebuster; smashed Spy Smasher; blanked Bullet Man; wrapped up the Web; blasted Blue Beetle; snuffed out The Human Torch; and best of all had desexualized Batman and Wonder Woman.

So many waiting. Hawkman to be pinioned; Iceman to be cooled; Vulcan to retire; Nemesis to meet ill-fate. So many ready for the final, ultimate objurgation.

He jigged in joy about the room at the thought. "Down with them!" he shouted happily through the open dormer window. His answer was a checked, chirrup from a suddenly-awakened, nesting sparrow.

Still gleefully prancing, he neared the massive, oaken chest and with a self-gratified gesture flung wide the lid.

Inside lay the garment of opal and gold. The meticulously embroidered, sequined-sparkling chest insignia with its flamboyant "W" glittered before his eyes.

The crimsoned cape, the blacked boots, the mauve mask -- all lay beneath. He knew without looking.

With a slam, he slung down the cover. He was no longer laughing. His lean, pallored fingers beat a strong tattoo against the closed lid.

He felt like a kite out of control; one bereft of a string-anchoring hand. He breathed in deeply. No emotion -- that was the saving solution.

Straightening himself both in body and composure, he crossed the room to sit in silent ponderousness at his desk. In his mind, he began methodically to prepare answers for questions certainly to be asked during tomorrow's interview

(Continued on Page 27.)

RICK WEINGROFF
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Whether or not there will be a fifth issue of Slam-Bang remains to be seen. If you see another issue advertised (in the RB-CC) then there will obviously be another issue. Otherwise, there will be no fifth issue, in which case sending money for it won't help much. The point is: though there will probably be many future issues, don't order any of them until they are advertised. Which also means: No Subscriptions.

Slam-Bang will gladly read contributions; however, we generally discourage such submissions. Because the fifth issue is but a nebulous non-thought in the backs of our id, we can not say when same will be published; and we feel t'would be grossly unfair to accept an article and then hold it for five years before our next publication appears. Anyway, after THAT much time, the article would probably be dated.

However, if you're bound and determined to see print in Slam-Bang please pay attention to our format. Our one basic determinant is that anything we publish must, in our opinion, be at least above excellent; and we much prefer extraordinary effort above all else. We are anti-amateur hero and amateur artwork and thus would do little more than chuckle over the submission of such material; but we have gone on record stating that if the hero/artwork were so excellent, so obviously superior that it is ready for appearance in professional comics, we would probably publish it. But maybe not, on general principles.

Most readers seem to mistake our policy on fact for a policy on opinion. In fact, numerous readers have pointed out that Slam-Bang is just one big opinion, which is itself just an opinion since actually Slam-Bang is a fact. Clarifying, Slam-Bang, like most non-amateur hero fanzines, is largely subjective. But we keep an objective eye out for our opinions.

The whole point is that while we respect opinions, we demand that the opinions be supported or else so obviously true as to not require proof. We have tried in our own efforts to avoid expressing our own opinion UNLESS we could present several reasons for our belief. Nationally, readers may disagree, but the important thing is that the burden of proving us wrong is the reader's -- we've shown why we feel the way we do, so it is the reader's turn to prove us wrong and his own views correct. It is this ultimate goal which contributions to Slam-Bang must achieve before they can be published.

But we do tend to publish less and less contributions as the issues roll by; take that as a warning. Note to letter writers: Actually, we expect no contributions to flood our offices in the next few years. Thus the above is, if not superfluous, at least pointless. However, we mention it because it applies, in Slam-Bang's case, more to letters to appear in Slam-Bangers than to anything else. Bear that in mind, won't you.

Slam-Bang has not/does not/will not publish original artwork, for two reasons. In the first place, original artwork is difficult to master on a multilith stencil, and secondly, we find very little original artwork that we would care to master in the first place. Instead, we prefer the much simpler process of tracing all illustration and those of you who have complimented us on our excellent artists (many have) are advised to send your congratulations for this issue to Howard Sherman and Al Capp, both of whom handled the artwork in the published comics from we the tracings were so graciously made.

When Slam-Bang 5 is advertised, please be assured that if you send for it, it will help if you include your name and address -- or if that is not possible, at least your name. We've received several orders which lacked either name or address -- which made sending the issue difficult. If your name is listed, we can either publish notice to forthwith send the address or we can hopefully find your name in the Who's Who. But if you don't include AT THE VERY LEAST your name, we'll be in a bit of a spot. Those of you who just want to send us money but wish to remain anonymous, please do so.

In our early advertisements for this issue, we included mention of two articles which not even the greatest detective could find in this issue of Slam-Bang. The two articles were eliminated for many reasons, not the least of which was the unexpected length of our lead article.

ROY THOMAS
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The biggest disagreement I have with you in regards to your editorial policies is in the matter of story narrative. Though I enjoyed your Fawcett article, for instance, I found the lack of all story narrative a fault, not a virtue. Sorry. Certainly I don't think that story narration alone is enough to carry an article, but we are attempting (at least I am attempting) to convey the flavor of heroes of bygone days, and this cannot be effectively done without narration. Your article, for all its fine writing and good points (even though I naturally diagreed with some), was therefore lacking punch by my standards, which admittedly were greatly influenced by the XERO type of thing. I would never have printed Howard Waltner's MLJ article in AE-4. It had information galore, but is still the one article in AE that I was never able to stomach at one sitting. Reason: a mere cataloguing, complete with numbers yet. Only the artwork that you deprecate so much in your editorial policy made it palatable to me -- and to many who voted it honors, I'd wager. (Editor: See "Behind the Spectre." Also, note that illoes in MLJ article were tracings -- which Slam-Bang wholeheartedly believes in.)

I don't believe that the JLA is chained to what Jennings rather tastelessly called the "rotting corpse" of the Justice Society, though this may have been the case when he wrote the article (many moons ago, I believe?). No one could deny, however, that there is definitely a regular effort to crowd too much into the stories. My roomate tried reading the latest issue (#34) the other night and said it was the worst thing he had ever encountered; he preferred a story he read later in, of all mags, Lois Lane (one about Ideal-Man who was really Superman in disguise). And I couldn't really argue the point with him. What should easily be the best of Julie's comics is about the worst, at least about every other issue. Hawkman, Green Lantern, the Flash, the Atom (the best of them, in my opinion), and even most issues of Batman and Detective (except where some of the art is concerned) -- all are eminently more readable than at least half of the JLA issues. Small wonder that this comic, which won the "best comic" title a few years ago hands down, wasn't even nominated in the Alleys this year. Even more ironic that the JLA-JSA story for the year was, bearing out my hypothesis that it is only certain issues that are particularly bad. Still, there's no reason for this. The plots sound good. But what is done with the stories is another thing. For instance, the old All-Star #30, in which the JSAers were driven crazy with dreams by Brain Wave, was one of the all-time comic greats, at least in certain parts of the individual episodes, as Fox captured the dream spirit beautifully. In JLA #34 the result, however, was catastrophic; partly because Dr. Destiny is no Brain Wave, but mainly because the whole thing just doesn't jell -- the comic comes out so that the whole is less than the sum of its many excellent component parts. (Editor: This has nothing to do with the point of Roy's letter, which is probably true, but we must admit to a bit of surprise as a result of a number of other comments on "The Justice Society of America Must be Destroyed!" Several readers seemed to get the impression (probably because of bad editing since we didn't get the impression when reading the original article) that Bob was referring to the actual members of the JSA. Though Bob may verywell wish the recent revival terminated, his article was referring to the spirit and style of the old stories.)

PAUL AKERS
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On a whole, I didn't think much of Slam-Bang. Oh, the Simon and Kirby article and a few others were okay, but one thing which can be stated in one word: Prejudice, stuck out like a sore thumb in many articles. You seem to have something against DC. It was always my thought that a zine's job was to present the facts before the fans, and then let the fans form their own opinion. What you're trying to do is brainwash the fans with your anti-DC propaganda. (Editor: All we can say, Paul, is that we received a letter from Pete von Sholly -- Quarters 34, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland -- which said, "Congratulations on your defense of Marvel in RB-CC #37. Anti Marvel as Slam-Bang seems, it must not be so.")

Important Note to Whom it May Concern: Our policy on pro-copies of Slam-Bang is that any pro who ever expressed an interest in receiving Slam-Bang is on our mailing list. Pros mentioned prominently also receive free copies.

MARTI SUE BECK
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First, concerning the reasons an individual might have for reading comics of the adventure type currently popular, the appeal of a pictorial medium was adequately handled in "100,000,000", but the added motivations of escape and wish-fulfillment were passed over quite lightly. Escape is doubtless a major factor in much of comics reading, but this is true of most types of entertainment media. In fact, in the most general sense, all of life is an escape from reality. We make plans for the future in full knowledge that we may be dead within the hour. "Culture" has no direct bearing on the necessities of self-preservation. Comics have no unique contribution in this area. As for wish-fulfillment, this factor has been shown to be a definite aspect of the appeal to younger readers, but it simply does not apply to a significant extent to the older readers, both in and out of fandom. Who among us, in this conformity-oriented age, would desire the distinction and inevitable isolation of the omnipotent "super" hero? Godhood is not an enviable state to humanity. These implications must be apparent to many of the more mature elements of fandom, yet we continue to read. Similarly, the lure of thrill and adventure, though strong, is but a pale reflection of what is abailable in the movies and on TV, and the argument that comic books are cheaper and more available no longer hold true. In fact, this point is upheld by the declining sales of comic books. (Editor: Sales are up, so far as we can tell, but in terms of distribution, your point is valid -- the number of stores selling comics continues to decrease) Yet a substantial number of people still buy them so there must be some other reasons for their popularity.

I can hardly offer a reason when even my own motivations are perplexing to me. I am simply pointing out that stock answers are not adequate answers when one considers the wide variety to be found among comic readers. We are too disparate and too numerous to all be suffering from the same aberration. Our very existence demands a serious appraisal of the value of comic books, and not from any orthodox viewpoint.

I should also like to comment on another topic loosely related to the above; my personal preferences and what I think are al least my surface reasons for them. I am bored to tears by most of the trash which comes out. The only reason I buy most comics is that once in a long while something with a trace of originality appears, something in which a stereotyped format transcends itself and produces something memorable. I say this in a rather liberal way. By "memorable" I half mean something which differentiates itself from the clutter of worn-out plots and recurring images which flood the comics. It can be amusing, exciting, philosophical, or horrifying, but it must be individual. Even such titles as the JLA and Green Lantern produce something of this nature occasionally, and so I tolerate their inanities for the sake of the rare gem.

One of the few comics I find always fresh and interesting is Spider-Man. The "soap-opera" appeal certainly plays a dominant role here, but I think there is a secondary aspect which has been overlooked. Spider-Man, of all comics, consistently supports the tragic view that man is too good to deserve his end and not good enough to avoid it. In the specific case of the "origin" story, this point is clear and obvious. Spider-Man's tragic flaw, his selfishness, caused

his downfall, in the form of his uncle's death. He is not evil, but neither does he have vision. It is his own actions that lead to his hate. It may be argued that only an incredible coincidence made this possible, but even Oedipus met and killed Laius by chance alone. In presenting this objection, it is ignored that the basic assumption of Lee's stories is that Fate will work towards the realization of Justice when there is Justice present to be supported. This concept is one of his major themes and is an answer to a moral dilemma posed by the comics: if Justice always wins in the end, why bother to fight for it? "100,000,000"'s explanation that "heroism in the altruistic pattern" will be impressed as desireable on the young reader's mind is not entirely satisfactory, for to the analytical mind in later years, the unexplained mores of fantastic heroes can hardly be a basis for a life pattern. Lee, however, presents a definite concept rather than a nebulous generalization. The two-fold theme is not only the unseen foundation of his stories; it pervades every part of them, complimenting the tragic view that man is ultimately responsible for his own fate, and that the blame must lay squarely on his own shoulders. It takes strength to view oneself in this light, and so the opinion that society is reponsible for the essence of one's being has become popular. But a valid moral code must be based on the tragic vision of personal responsibility, and so, in one sense, comic books are more "moral" in supporting this view than are their detractors who seem convinced that the comics, and not the readers, are responsible for the reader's actions. I am aware that the above analysis is overly dignifying a relatively simple form of mass-produced, popular "art," which, among those less fanatic than we, ends up in the garbage, but the very fact that it is subject to such interpretation indicates to me a depth which quite compensates for the numerous flaws in Marvel, and is the reason why I usually get more enjoyment from Lee's work than from others'.

(Editor: Comedians tell us, when pressed by interviewers, that all comedy is based on tragedy. Man's inhumanity to other men is funny because we are not the person receiving the inhumanity. Thus, to see a man fall is funny; but when we fall it is not humorous. And when Thing calls Torch a Human Matchstick we laugh, but when someone calls us a name we get angry. In regards Spider-Man, since he is the one comic book that regularly features tragedy, he must also be the funniest book ever written. Tragedy follows tragedy, and we laugh our heads off because we don't have Spider-Man's problems. Which is just as well because since we don't have his powers either, we'd be in a sorry state having to solve some of his problems.)

He thought again of the costume hidden within the chest. Yet, this time he smiled; he was now in complete control.

"No," he said half-aloud, "If you can't make it as a super hero, you can always be a psychiatrist."

And laughing -- he noted this thought among others that were to follow.

END